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Medieval tower and 9th-century paintings discovered by Polish archaeologists in Sudan



A perfectly preserved fragment of a medieval fortification system and paintings inside a church from the ninth century have been discovered by Polish archaeologists in Old Dongola, Sudan. Dongola Citadel is located on the uplifted rock on the bank of the Nile, surrounded by fortifications built in the late fifth and sixth centuries. In the past, archaeologists stumbled upon its walls, but never before such well preserved fragments. This year, they unveiled the tower preserved to a height of more than 8 m.

"Towers in Dongola were massive structures built of dried bricks and crushed sandstone blocks. They were built at regular distances of 32-35 meters," noted Prof. Włodzimierz Godlewski. In order to reach the tower, archaeologists had to wade through the remnants of the seventeenth-century house built on the tower crown. The tower and fortifications were dated to the turn of fifth and sixth centuries. The exterior, brick cladding had been added in the fifteenth/sixteenth century. Desert sand quickly covered unused fortifications. Its parts were used as residential house walls.

Also discovered in Dongola were paintings located in the church adjacent to the King Joannes Palace (sixth century). The ninth-century large basilica (measuring 25 x 15 meters) has walls and circular pillars in the southern and eastern parts preserved to a height of more than 4 m. "Last season, slowly, as the conservation progressed, we have been uncovering the interior of the building. On the walls, as well as pillars and pilasters, appear more paintings on plaster made of lime," said Prof. Godlewski.

The plaster surface was severely damaged and required constant conservation during the excavations. However, the quality of the paintings, showing Christ, the Virgin Mary, saints, and

angels, is noteworthy. The paintings are accompanied by Greek inscriptions as well as Old Nubian texts, probably added later. Dongola was the capital of the Christian Makuria until the fall in the fourteenth century. The kingdom stretched from the northern area of today's southern Sudan to Egypt.

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